

May 20, 2004

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Bender, Mr. Byerly, Mr. Charles, Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Roberts

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mr. Buck, Mr. Fairbairn, Mr. Frank

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Westa, Ms. Purnell, Mr. Adams

Mr. Bender called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and seated Members Bender, Byerly, Charles, and Roberts and Mr. Buck for Mr. Rimsky.

Mr. Charles noted the Commission had decided to meet with several professionals to discuss how best to go about conducting the upcoming study of the Depot, which was recommended in the Plan of Conservation and Development. Some of the questions already raised were: 1) At what point should there be public input? 2) What were the major issues to be addressed? and 3) What should be included in the request for proposal letter? Mr. Charles introduced Mr. Westa from the Landscape Architecture department at UConn.

Mr. Rimsky entered at 4:05 p.m. and was seated.

Mr. Westa noted UConn's Landscape Architecture dept. addresses land planning, site planning, and community planning. He presented a report done for the Town of Morris, Ct. as an example of the type of work he and his undergraduate students could accomplish. He described the process used to draft the report, which included design studios, consideration of natural and social aspects of the area, use of GIS, on site tours, photos, conversations with residents and Town officials, design workshops, schematic design and layout alternatives, and written descriptions of alternatives. The final report included inventory analysis, survey of the community, consultation with the Commission to determine what it thought was most important, consideration of the character of the community, graphics, and funding sources. Mr. Westa noted his department does not compete with planning consultants, but can provide a concise, professional report, which will detail several viable options.

The request for proposal letter was discussed. Mr. Charles thought the Commission should first go through a "vision process" to educate itself on the issues that must be addressed. He did not think the letter should be written until the Commission knew all the questions it had to ask. Mr. Bender thought the letter could begin with a request for an outline for such a study. Mr. Westa suggested the Commission contact COG to obtain examples of RFP letters by other towns. Mr. Charles said he had contacted COG and Mr. McGuinness recommended he call Mr. Westa and Mr. Plattus from Yale. Mr. Westa noted what he looks for in an RFP letter: specificity of the request, types of uses to be considered, and agreement on the issues to be addressed. He said the clearer the scope of the work is defined, the better, and that if there is no consensus on the work to be covered, the process would be much longer and more expensive.

The Commissioners disagreed about whether there was already a consensus about the issues that should be addressed. Some thought there was not and the public should be involved at a very early stage, while others thought the Commission had just spent two years working on the Plan, which included obtaining public input. Mr. Rimsky pointed out how a group with a specific agenda can attend a public meeting and skew an issue. He thought in the end the Commission should trust its instincts.

Funding for the study was briefly discussed. Mr. Charles noted the Commission had requested \$100,000, but the Board of Finance had approved only \$35,000. Mr. Westa noted the study UConn had done for Morris cost \$5000 and suggested a two step process. First a similar study could be completed for Washington and this could be the basis for the RFP letter. He said the initial study would include

research in trends such as sustainable development practices, the Village District legislation, current state Plan of Conservation and Development, economic trends, etc.

The RFP letter was discussed further. Mr. Westa advised the Commission to clearly describe in common language the problems to be addressed. The use of buzz words could be confusing. Mr. Westa also noted that by deciding on a specific list of issues before drafting the letter, the Commission could determine what professionals it would require as part of the study team. For example, if there were septic issues to be addressed, the Commission might require a sanitary engineer to be involved in the study. He noted as issues are added to the list the work involved in the study increases exponentially.

Issues that were noted throughout the discussion included:

- pressure for economic development along the state routes
- how to incorporate economic trends into the report
- commercial rents that are too high for viable enterprises
- statewide or regional issues the Commission might not be aware of that could impact the Depot
- possible future need for Town sewage treatment system
- not enough parking
- traffic circulation/should River Road be realigned with Titus Road
- how to deal with flood plain concerns in the Depot
- how to encourage mixed housing
- how to encourage the economic vitality of the village center
- education of the public
- most appropriate use for the Town Garage property on Titus Road
- how to get cooperation of DOT

It was the consensus it had been helpful to learn how UConn could help the Commission carry out the first stage of a two stage approach to the Depot study. Mr. Westa said he and his students could begin work during the fall semester if the Commission elected to conduct the study in this manner.

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting. By Mr. Charles.

Mr. Bender adjourned the meeting at 5:20 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,
Janet M. Hill
Land Use Coordinator

Note: This Special Meeting was taped. The tape is on file in the Land Use Office, Bryan Memorial Town Hall, Washington Depot.